

Rhetoric of Landscape Architecture and Interior Design Discourses: Preparation for Cross-Disciplinary Practice

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Abstract: *The rhetoric of the pedagogic discourses of landscape architectural students and interior design students is described as part of a doctoral study undertaken to document practices and orientations prior to cross-disciplinary collaboration. We draw on the theoretical framework of Basil Bernstein, an educational sociologist, and the rhetorical method of Kenneth Burke, a literary dramatist, to study the grammars of 'landscape' representation employed within these disciplinary examples. We investigate how prepared final year students are for working in a cross-disciplinary manner. The discursive interactions of their work, as illustrated by four examples of drawn images and written text, are described. Our findings suggest that we need to concern ourselves with our pedagogic discourse that brings uniqueness and value to our disciplines, alongside shared discourses between disciplines.*

Keywords: *rhetorical analysis, disciplinary discourse, pedagogic practice*

Introduction

At the border of 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness', interior design and landscape architecture teachers/practitioners deliberate over their territorial claims to the 'landscape'. While both landscape architecture and interior design disciplines have a strong intrinsic relationship to 'landscape', little empirical evidence has been offered in the literature as to whether or not our students might share an understanding of this concept. Before students from each of our disciplines begin working together on a cross-disciplinary project, it is important for educators to explore the nature of the pedagogic discourses of each group. These disciplinary discourses may offer some insight into how the two disciplines might collaborate on inside and outside spaces in the future.

The study is framed by the theoretical work of Basil Bernstein, who aimed to explain 'the inner logic of pedagogic practice' (Bernstein, 2000). Bernstein argues that strong, clearly bounded disciplinary identities insulate themselves from other disciplines while weaker, less specialised disciplines struggle with dominance and subordination.

Rationale for the study

This study involved two groups of students: graduate diploma landscape architecture students and graduate diploma interior design students. The focus of the study for both

these groups was their understanding of 'landscape'. Underpinning this was a concern for identifying common as well as differing representations of 'landscape'. We speculated that any common representations could be viewed as a type of shared knowledge while differing representations could be regarded as revealing points of resistance. This may not be necessarily negative. Points of resistance could reflect disciplinary uniqueness, something to be reinforced because of its potential to provide for a complementary view of the world.

Practices in the disciplines

An exploration of 'landscape' in the 'interior' context

For seven interior design students, the study focused on 'landscape' representation undertaken in a research unit that involved the students developing an understanding of and basic skills in using creative practice as a research strategy. In this component, students were asked at the beginning and end of the semester to externalise their own understanding of 'landscape' through writing and drawing. Their written responses and drawings, together with those from the landscape architecture students, were analysed by their interior design teacher.

An exploration of 'landscape' in the 'exterior' context

For the nineteen landscape architecture students, this study focused on a landscape planning unit that aimed to assist students to integrate their understanding of 'landscape' in a planning context, alongside their experiences of landscape design. Students were encouraged to reflect on this understanding at the start and the end of the semester through drawings and text. Their written responses and drawings, together with those from the interior design students, were analysed by their landscape architecture teacher.

Looking at drawings and words

The drawn and written data were analysed to capture the rhetorical or persuasive qualities using the model of dramatism devised by Kenneth Burke in 1945 (Stillar, 1998). He defined rhetoric as the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents (Burke, 1945, p.41). In addition to emphasising the audience orientation of language, Burke's perspective studied the properties of language that produce its rhetorical orientation. A central focus in this study is the discovery of human 'motives'. In the Burkean sense, 'motive' refers to the motivating aspects of language in the movement between different elements that produce specific meanings.

This method emphasises the symbolic and cultural aspects of effective discourse and it is helpful in studying the student language of drawing and words, not merely in terms of the

substantive focus, but also in terms of the students' orientations and motives in relation to their audience. Burke's model consists of five elements: act, scene, agent, agency and purpose. *Act* refers to 'what happened'; *scene* focuses on the context or background setting of the act; *agent* is the person or thing producing the act; *agency* refers to how the act was done; and *purpose* identifies why it was done (Burke, 1945). These elements are used to identify how the students construct representations of the notion of 'landscape' with reference to the practices and terminologies of the pedagogic context. Drawings and words combine these elements in different ways, each leading to a different construction of motive. Burke called these various combinations, ratios. These ratios assist in revealing the dominant element in the rhetorical text and provide some insight into the most important philosophical dimension of the situation as seen by the rhetorician (Foss, 1996, p.460).

Although the work of all students in each class was analysed, the work of four students is discussed in this paper as examples of the distinctly different 'texts' produced by students and their implied representational 'motives' – where 'text' is understood as the analytical object consisting of either drawing or writing or both.

Persuasive elements in the disciplinary discourses

An exploration of 'landscape' in the 'interior' context

In the two interior design examples, the students have reflected on and represented the salient elements of 'landscape' to be read by their viewer, understood here to be their teacher/practitioner in research. Each conveys a different 'motive' or persuasive quality in the pedagogic discourse surrounding this concept. So in Figure 1, a student depicts the juxtaposition of 'exterior' and 'interior' as two parts of a whole, with the boundary seen as a 'barrier' placed left of centre and the framing left open. A further dimension is added to the 'exterior' element, being composed of foreground and background.

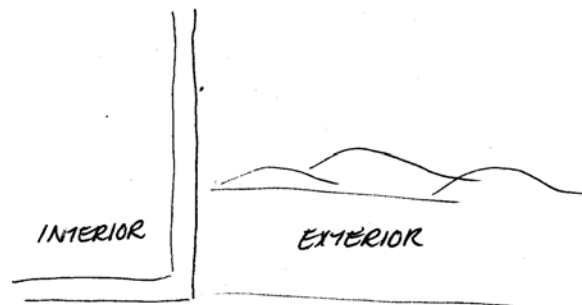


Figure 1: An interior design student's representation of 'landscape' at the beginning of the semester.

We suggest that the agent could be the producer of the text or the viewer of the text, positioned out of the picture, in an abstract, neutral (on the border) viewpoint. The act is understood as 'seeing the relationship' between inside and outside, something that is 'happening' in the drawing. The agency is the way the 'marks on paper' depict 'interior' using two parallel lines, a convention of interior design, and an everyday depiction of 'exterior'. The scene is what is depicted in the representation of 'landscape, a juxtaposition of the inside of a (built) structure on equal footing with the outside foreground and background, a division between the insideness and outsideness of 'landscape'. The purpose suggested by the producer of this image is that 'landscape' is the complement of 'interior', an equal partner in the discourse concerning the world around us.

In addition to the drawing, words offer alternative potentials for a rhetorical view of the concept. In the first example, the student represents 'landscape' as:

*exterior surroundings that may vary in scale eg. a backyard versus a mountain range.
The exterior part of an inside/outside relationship.*

Here the agent again becomes the viewer/reader of the text positioned in *exterior surroundings*, the objectified 'landscape'. The text persuades us that the agent operates in two ways. It relates 'knowable' outside places to one another, as well as relating inside and outside 'unknowable' places. This offers us greater insight into 'seeing the relationship' expressed in the drawing. The agency is how 'landscape' varies in scale, operating as part of a relationship. The scene is both 'this' space and the 'other' space, distinct from interior: the exterior part of an inside/outside relationship. The purpose is to distinguish 'landscape' from 'interior', while at the same time bringing outside and inside together as a whole entity.

In a second example in Figure 2, a student uses centrality to depict a horizon bounded by a frame slightly right of centre in their drawing. The detail associated with each element here is more ambiguous than the first. Outside the frame, the boundaries of the drawing are left open. In both examples, space is represented as an abstraction or theoretical concept, simultaneously close to and distant from the viewer on the two-dimensional page. It is not represented as the everyday lived experience of 'landscape'.

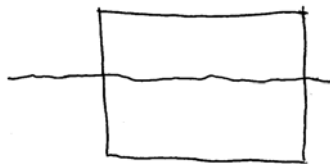


Figure 2: An interior design student's representation of 'landscape' at the end of the semester.

We suggest that the agent is again the producer of the text *or* the viewer of the text, positioned out of the picture, on equal eye level with the horizon line and the framed viewpoint. The act is understood as ‘experiencing the relationship’ between ‘self’ and the ‘other’ that lies beyond the viewer as a person, something that is both sensed and understood conceptually. The agency is the way the frame commands the viewer to gaze at a part of the horizon while knowing that more can be seen and understood. The scene is an abstract, minimalist representation that both distances the viewer from and invites the viewer into the ‘landscape. The purpose conveyed by the drawing is that ‘landscape’ is open to interpretation, bounded in some ways by a particular viewpoint but with the potential for multiple meanings.

In this example, the student also describes the concept as:

*highly personal; to be experienced; to be viewed in section/parts; hint of horizon;
5 senses especially sight, colour and visual texture.*

We argue that the agent here remains the producer or viewer of the text, extending what is expressed in the drawing. ‘Landscape’ becomes the act or process through which something is experienced, viewed or sensed. It is the very personal, highly subjective experience that becomes the agency. It includes viewing in section, in parts, in colour and as visual texture, conventions employed in interior design. The scene is both the internal world of the person and the external world of the perceived landscape. The purpose conveyed in these words is that ‘landscape’ is a phenomenon of personal interpretation from sensory experience.

An exploration of ‘landscape’ in the ‘exterior’ context

In Figure 3, a student depicts three representations of ‘landscape’: a realist view with foreground and background, a three-dimensional view with symbols leading the eye to the background and a plan view, juxtaposed on a two-dimensional page.

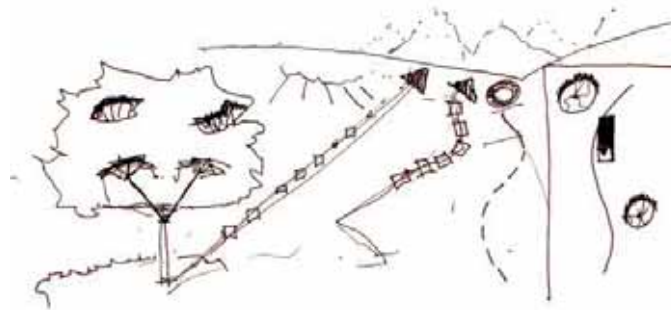


Figure 3: A landscape architecture student’s representation of ‘landscape’ at the beginning of the semester.

The agent is seen as the producer or the viewer of the text, positioned above the observed landscape. The act consists of ways of representing 'landscape' as an object using numerous symbolic conventions employed in landscape architecture. The agency is the depiction of a range of features comprising the whole but drawn from three distant viewpoints. The scene is a naturalistic place: of trees, hills, mountains, but not of people, buildings, or cars. The purpose suggested by the drawing is that 'landscape' should be considered as a represented object connected to an observable, natural place.

The pentad model can also apply to the written component of the student's text:

The terrestrial in which we as humans live, see and use.

The agent could be the 'terrestrial' object or 'we as humans' existing within it. The act may be either the way in which we as humans actively live, perceive and operate in this object or how the 'terrestrial' is passively colonised by us as humans. The agency is the positioning of 'terrestrial' and 'humans' as co-existing entities. The scene is an interactive world where humans are dominant. The purpose of the words here suggests that 'landscape' is an object to be utilised for 'our' human requirements.

In the final example in Figure 4, a student uses words to form the elements of the drawing; 'inclusive ideas dreams possibilities hopes relevance wholistic lasting meaningful' form 'hills' and 'information communities' form 'trees'. Here the boundary between written language and drawn image becomes blurred.



Figure 4: A landscape architecture student's representation of 'landscape' at the end of the semester.

The agent is considered to be the producer *and* the viewer of the text, as one. The act is a subtle collaboration where the representation by the producer and the interpretation by the viewer are interconnected. The agency is the way in which words compose the image and

image connects the words. The scene is both the realm of the mind and the visual senses of the body. The purpose suggests that 'landscape' should be seen as symbolic of multiple meanings and intentions, open to abstraction and interpretation.

The written text:

Landscape is inclusive of all our surroundings / environments – including our personal perceptions which are future landscapes

persuades the reader that the agent is 'us', the viewer and producer of the text and future landscapes. The act is the 'inclusiveness' of 'landscape'. The agency is how we use this concept to consider our perceptions of our surroundings / environments. The scene is an abstract, all encompassing view of our present and future environments. The purpose suggested by these words is that 'landscape' is conceptualised as an entity that transcends physical and conceptual notions of the world, open to personal and collective interpretation.

Blurred boundaries in the 'interior' and 'exterior' contexts

Identification of the five elements gives us an overview of how these students have chosen to represent this concept to their teachers. The most common dimension of these representations was the agent, the person or thing producing the act, frequently conveyed in the data as the viewer and/or the producer of the text. In contrast, the act varied from the objectification and experience of 'landscape' to the interconnection and collaboration between 'self' and other'. The agency – how the act was accomplished – and the scene where the act took place were different in each student example. 'Landscape' as object and experience was often expressed in distinct disciplinary language while 'landscape' as an interconnected and collaborative concept was expressed in abstract ways open to interpretation. The purpose, why each act was performed in a particular way, differed between disciplines. In both the interior design examples, the viewer was persuaded that 'landscape' is much more than the everyday 'lived' perception of our surroundings. In both landscape architecture examples, the viewer was persuaded that what is important to 'us' is the connection between human action and the objectified 'landscape' as well as the symbolic view of the physical and metaphysical 'landscape'.

Key elements of the disciplinary discourses

The drawn and written texts represent examples of what their producers understand to be a valued concept of 'landscape' by their viewers. Of interest here is how students of interior design and landscape architecture choose to represent a shared concept that should convince their teachers of their disciplinary and cross-disciplinary 'competence'.

The producers of the first, second and fourth drawings ordered the elements of each visual interaction in such way that it was the agent, the viewer of the text, which dominated how the concept was understood. The agent was offered control over what was seen in the drawing. In the third drawing, however, agency was the dominant element in the representation. Here, the agency brought objects together in one drawing, showing they all belonged to the concept of 'landscape' and the agency controlled how the concept was to be understood. The written texts pointed to similar elements in the students' representations. In the second and third written texts, the agency was the dominant element in that the words carried an action-oriented connotation. Interestingly, the first written text presented a different rhetorical position. Here the dominant element was the scene where the author gave precedence to exterior surroundings as a backyard and a mountain range, setting up an understanding of exterior as a visible setting.

According to Foss (1996), Burke suggested that the dominant term in a discourse might be used to identify the corresponding philosophical system. If the dominant element in the pentad reveals what a student regarded as the most appropriate response to the pedagogic situation, then the agent as the controlling factor may reflect an idealist viewpoint. We suggest that here a student's text could reveal an understanding of 'landscape' that allows the action of the agent to determine the 'truth' or 'reality' of the concept. Where the agency is offered as the primary feature of the concept, the text could reveal a pragmatic approach, an understanding that focuses on 'landscape' as a useful 'tool' in the student's practice. Where the scene is the most salient aspect, the text could propose an understanding that sees 'landscape' in terms of its physical presence, something that just 'is'.

Conclusion

The study highlighted common as well as differing representations of 'landscape'. The most common dimension in the drawn and written representations was the agent, the person or thing producing the act, frequently conveyed in the data as the viewer and/or the producer of the pedagogic discourse. This led us to a conclusion that our students demonstrated an understanding of 'landscape' that allowed the action of the viewer to determine the 'truth' or 'reality' of the concept. We suggest that for cross-disciplinary practice, this is a valuable understanding in preparing practitioners to transgress the boundaries of their discipline and communicate with others on the same conceptual level. This idealism corresponded to texts that were abstract highly metaphoric and acting like a universal language.

The differing representations were also of interest in that they were regarded as potential points of resistance to integrative practice. While we have only four examples to consider

here, the data does illustrate the potential for individuals in one discipline, interior design in this case, to persuade us of the value of the abstract ideal while at the same time confessing to the importance of tools such as *scale*, *section* and *visual texture* in a pragmatic material world. In another disciplinary context, landscape architecture in this case, an individual may reveal their pragmatic conviction that the meaning of their symbolic action lies in its observable consequences, while another individual conveys their idealistic view that the mind or spirit of each person experiences something fundamentally real. We suggest that in applied design disciplines, there is a point of resistance to the esoteric, introspective view, where we seek to persuade our audience of the importance of a concrete perceptible view of our disciplinary discourse and practice.

Faced with integrative practices, we need to concern ourselves with that part of our pedagogic discourse that makes each of our disciplines unique and valuable, as well as that part that should be shared between disciplines. We should continue to develop the verticality of our discourses, with further research into the power and control relations of our pedagogic practices.

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